

Yes!

More Women in Transport



Key demands by the European
Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) to
make transport fit for women to work in





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Background

The transport sector in Europe is changing fast, and the role played by women transport workers in the industry is evolving. However, there is little awareness of how the changes will affect them. Women's share in the entire transport industry workforce – only 22% – is insufficient. While there are considerable differences among the various transport sectors (land transport: 14%; waterborne transport: 20%; and air transport: 40%), overall, transport remains a male-dominated sector. Women predominantly work in customer-facing or administrative jobs, often under more flexible work arrangements and in part-time jobs. Women also often work in mobile or isolated workplaces, for example, on board trains or ships. Furthermore, there has been little change in the working and living conditions for women transport workers, which are often poor. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have the potential to aggravate the inequalities that already exist in the sector.

The survey laid bare the degree to which workplaces and working conditions fail to meet the specific needs of women transport workers

ETF's Survey: the transport sector's barriers to women

To uncover the real reasons for the low female employment rate in transport and to find out what is needed to make the transport sector fair and fit for women to work in, ETF launched a large-scale survey in October 2019.¹ Over 2,770 women transport workers from across Europe responded and made their voices heard. Respondents came from all transport sectors and represented the whole range of transport professions.

The topic of gender and transport is a multifaceted one, and the survey revealed that women working in the sector often face two competing realities. On the one hand, the sector offers interesting long-term employment, and 82% of the respondents indicated that they enjoyed working at their workplaces. On the other hand, the survey laid bare the degree to which workplaces and working conditions fail to meet the specific needs of women transport workers, and it highlighted the particular barriers that the women workers encounter. Many of these barriers result from prevailing gender inequalities and stereotypes in the sector.

The ETF survey² reveals that women transport workers encounter the following barriers:

- 1 The ETF survey was carried out between 7 October and 29 November 2019.
- 2 ETF, *Making the transport sector fit for women to work on – findings from a survey of women transport workers by the ETF*, August 2020. <https://www.etf-europe.org/resource/etf-report-making-the-transport-sector-fit-for-women-to-work-in-findings-from-a-survey-of-women-transport-workers/>

- **A dominant culture of masculinity and gender stereotypes**
- **Discrimination and unequal treatment at work**
- **Lack of work-life balance, and 'the care trap'**
- **Deficiencies in provision for women's health and safety at work, including access to decent sanitary facilities**
- **High levels of violence and harassment against women at the workplace**

These barriers create a working environment that fails to attract women to the transport professions, fails to support women in doing their jobs well and fails to retain them in the sector.

Since the ETF survey was conducted before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, it must be noted that the pandemic has had a severe impact on workers, both women and men. However, owing to the highly gendered nature of the sector, there have been specific, additional adverse effects on women transport workers. Moreover, as the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has shown,³ the COVID-19 pandemic is threatening to reverse gender equality gains and thus to add to existing inequalities. Since women predominantly work in customer-facing jobs (where there has often been a lack of adequate and appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), they face an even higher risk of infection than male transport workers – but also higher risks from having to face aggressive passengers, customers and the wider public. A worrying development in public transport is that women transport workers have been physically and verbally attacked, abused and spat at by passengers after requesting them to wear masks – in some cases with fatal consequences. It should not be the responsibility of transport workers to police the wearing of masks or to enforce on the public rules that have been introduced by governments to stop the spread of COVID-19.

During the lockdowns across Europe, there has also been an alarming increase of domestic violence against women self-isolating at home. This has become an important workplace issue for women who are working remotely or teleworking, which many women are having to combine with responsibility for taking care of their children while schools and kindergartens remain closed.

While women transport workers have been playing a vital role as key workers, they have been completely overlooked in the responses to the crisis at the national and European levels. That is why the need to break down the barriers and make the sector fit for women workers has now become even more urgent than before.

ETF's key demands

ETF is committed to shattering the glass ceiling and fighting for fairness and better terms and conditions for women in transport. To end the gender-based occupational segregation in the transport sector and to make the industry more accommodating to women transport workers, the barriers that make the transport industry unattractive for women need to be eliminated. This requires gender-responsive policy changes by policy makers and concrete measures by social partners at both national and European level. In monitoring the gender

3 EIGE, Covid-19 and gender equality.
<https://eige.europa.eu/topics/health/covid-19-and-gender-equality>

shift in transport, a key indicator will be the level of retention of female workers, not only the recruitment rate.

To ensure that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic does not aggravate the existing inequalities in the transport sector, it is crucial that all relevant actors at national and European level join forces to establish a gender-equal new normal that guarantees good jobs for all workers. Through consultation with the trade unions, clear policies and measures need to be developed to deal with COVID-19 and to answer the needs of women transport workers. These policies and measures must ensure that women are protected during the crisis, and that their rights are strengthened and reinforced.

► *Mainstreaming gender-responsive policy*

To bring an end to occupational segregation within the transport labour market and to promote the equal participation of women, ETF calls for a gender-responsive approach to be mainstreamed into EU transport policy. This would ensure that the needs of women and men are equally satisfied in all strategies, policies and actions.

A negative example is represented by the shortcomings of ongoing discussions about the future of work and the impact of new technologies on labour markets in transport. There is an urgent need not only to tackle the social dimension of digitalisation in transport but also to recognise that the new technologies will affect women and men transport workers differently. Women are more likely to be vulnerable to the adverse effects of digitalisation, so new trends may perpetuate or even worsen existing gender inequalities.

Moreover, there is a “gender data gap” in transport, which may lead to policy decisions that disadvantage women transport workers. One example is the lack of data about the pay gap between men and women working in transport. There is therefore a critical need to carry out gender-responsive research to obtain gender-disaggregated data on the situation of women in the transport sector. Just as important is the need to perform specific impact assessments regarding gender-based discrimination and inequalities in the transport sector, as well as on the adverse economic and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women transport workers. In these respects, it is important to recognise the diversity of women, and the fact that some women, more than others, may experience multiple or intersecting forms of discrimination.

► *Strengthening social dialogue*

Collective bargaining at its various levels is a central tool for eliminating gender discrimination, establishing equal treatment of workers, and breaking down the identified barriers that confront women workers. However, women are often underrepresented in national tripartite and bipartite bodies and in company-based representative bodies (such as, works councils or health and safety committees), as well as in trade unions and professional associations. That is why establishing gender parity in these bodies, and engaging in social dialogue focused on eliminating gender-discriminatory practices, will be keys to increasing women’s participation in the workforce.

As gender segregation in the labour market leads to different levels of exposure to COVID-19 for women and men, it is crucial to negotiate the priority issues with trade unions, and with women’s participation.

► *Work-life balance and the “care trap”*

One of the major reasons for the employment gap is the fact that women disproportionately continue to shoulder the main burden of caring responsibilities. Moreover, part-time work has been identified as a trap for women that significantly affects their pay and future pensions.

Becoming pregnant and having family responsibilities particularly affect women transport workers. The ETF survey shows that 39% of the respondents who worked part-time indicated care responsibilities as a reason. The survey also indicates that maternity, maternity leave or caring responsibilities each incur penalties at work, such as frozen or reduced salaries or even unpaid leave, if the leave is extended beyond the statutory minimum. This may result in longer absences from work and have long-term effects on wage development and pension rights. More broadly, 35% of the respondents said they were unhappy, or somewhat unhappy, with their work-life balance.

To advance towards gender equality and to get more women into the transport sector, there is an urgent need to promote work-life balance and to close the “care trap”. Gender equality must be considered as an issue for both women and men, while domestic tasks and caring for dependent relatives should be more equally shared. ETF therefore calls on social partners to commit to:

- **promoting collective bargaining as an effective tool for improving workers’ work-life balance, career opportunities, lifelong learning and other aspects of personal and professional development**
- **developing a working environment that facilitates the reconciliation of work, family and private life for both women and men**
- **adapting work patterns and working time to the needs of parents and carers, so they are not penalised in respect of pay, career advancements or opportunities while fulfilling family responsibilities**
- **tackling stereotypes to boost the take-up of paternity leave by men**
- **ensuring equal pay for equal work, or work of equal value**
- **acknowledging the diversity of families and the particular needs and rights, for example, of single-parent families, adoptive families, same-sex parents, and others.**

► *Improving women’s health and safety*

There is an urgent need to take full account of women transport workers’ needs, and the particular hazards they are exposed to, in occupational health and safety policies, as well as to adapt workplaces to meet those needs. Women must be involved in the development and implementation of such policies and measures.

To provide a healthy and safe workplace for women, which is gender inclusive and responsive, the ETF calls on employers to ensure:

- **a gender-balanced approach to health and safety**
- **tools, equipment and PPE that are of good quality and suitable for women’s bodies, free of charge to workers**

- **ergonomic design of workplaces, to suit the needs of women**
- **safe access to adequate washing and sanitation facilities at work, and ample breaks without fear of penalties – a particularly urgent matter in view of the fact that many public facilities often used by transport workers have been shut down owing to the COVID-19 pandemic**
- **strict and regular cleaning procedures in workplaces, taking account of the specific needs of women workers, such as menstruation, pregnancy or menopause**
- **additional protection at the workplace for women who are pregnant or have recently given birth**
- **working conditions that minimise the transmission of infection and facilitate social distancing.**

► *Ending violence and harassment*

While all transport workers face risks of violence and harassment, women transport workers face particular risks working in a male-dominated working environment, and in providing predominantly customer-facing services. That is why ending violence and harassment against women is closely connected to ending gender discrimination at work, and recognising the diversity of women.

The COVID-19 pandemic has very clearly been accompanied by an alarming increase of violence and harassment against women transport workers, as well as a significant rise in domestic violence during lockdowns in Europe. This requires urgent and coordinated action from governments and employers, in the workplace and in wider society. Even before the pandemic, a survey by ETF in 2017⁴ revealed that violence and harassment by colleagues, supervisors and third parties was widely but unacceptably considered to be “part of the job”. That is why the ETF calls on the European governments, as a matter of priority, both to ratify and implement the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention No 190, and to ratify the Council of Europe’s Istanbul Convention at European level and in every member state.

In addition, the ETF calls on employers to:

- **implement gender-responsive safety measures and reporting and complaints procedures for workers, including the additional safety measures required to combat the rising levels of violence and harassment against women by members of the public**
- **improve workplace culture so that there is respect and dignity of all workers and a zero-tolerance policy towards violence and harassment, and offensive or discriminatory behaviour**
- **promote safe and effective organisation of work**
- **implement effective human resource procedures that are trusted by women workers**

4 ETF, *Violence against women at work in transport – summary report of findings from a survey*, 2017. <https://www.etf-europe.org/resource/violence-against-women-at-work-in-transport-summary-report-of-findings-from-a-survey-by-etf/>

- **negotiate, with trade unions, workplace policies that give support to survivors of domestic violence, enabling them to continue working safely in their jobs, including when working remotely or teleworking**
- **provide safe commuting measures and sufficient parking spaces for staff that are close to the workplace**
- **provide information about support services for survivors of violence**
- **sponsor awareness-raising campaigns to eliminate gender-based violence, as well as falsehoods, negative stereotypes, stigma and underreporting.**

To increase awareness concerning violence and harassment against women transport workers, and to help social partners in develop effective workplace policies that prevent and eliminate the problem, ETF will publish, on 25 November 2020 – International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women – a guidance document comprising two parts:

- **a comprehensive model workplace policy and procedure**
- **a step-by-step guide and checklist for gender-responsive risk assessment as part of the management of occupational health and safety.**

Conclusions

To sum up, the ETF survey reveals an urgent need for substantial changes to make the transport sector genuinely fit for women to work in. Eliminating the entrenched male culture, improving working conditions, establishing equal treatment and good work-life balance, providing access to proper sanitary facilities, and ensuring safe workplaces are the major factors in attracting and retaining women in the transport industry. Moreover, it needs to be ensured that the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on women transport workers do not aggravate or reproduce the inequalities that already exist in the transport sector. To avoid this, it is imperative that the transport industry, including employers, government, and trade unions, implement a gender-responsive approach.

In the words of a woman railway worker, the following changes are necessary to improve her workplace:

“A clean driving cab, time between trains to go to the loo (not on the train); flexible working hours; more than six weeks’ maternity pay (if you’re sick, you get 16 weeks); a privacy policy where your personal file isn’t openly discussed with your colleagues; a zero-tolerance policy towards bullying and sexual harassment; and a less toxic work culture would be appreciated.”

Failing to overcome these barriers is no longer acceptable. The recruitment of women cannot be considered simply as a response to the shortage of transport workers. It has to be seen as a goal that is integrated into a holistic approach. Now, more than ever, we need to ensure that we do not regress, but emerge stronger from this crisis, moving towards a transport sector that guarantees equal, healthy, and violence-free workplaces for all workers, with the guarantee reinforced by policymakers, companies, and trade unions at all levels.



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